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Modern Art from a Japanese
Point of View."

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MODERN ART FROM A JAPANESE POINT OF VIEW

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THIS essay is a confession—hence an appeal; an appeal, therefore a protest. And protests are apt to be wearisome. It concerns itself chiefly with the problems of modern art as seen from a Japanese point of view. The situation is not without humor, if we consider that the present difficulties of Japanese painting are partly due to your having introduced us to the lights and shadows of a modern national existence. It may be that retribution has overtaken you, in being asked to lend your ears to my incompetent presentation of the very problems of which you yourselves are the remote and innocent cause. I trust, however, that the Far Eastern point of view may not be altogether devoid of interest to you.

Your modern painting and the circumstances in which it is created are still seen by us against the background of our own ancient traditions. Our criterions may not be orthodox in your eyes, but they at least represent the standards of taste which have guided the æsthetic attempts of India, China, Corea and Japan through hoary centuries. Remember, too, that my criticisms are not dictated by any want of respect for Western art, compelling as it does, in all its phases, the unconscious homage of wonder, if not always of admiration. Our reverential attitude toward any true expressions of art can be traced to our time-honored axiom, that a picture should be approached as one would enter the presence of a great prince. We have been taught to prostrate ourselves even to a vase of flowers before examining the beauty of its arrangement.

In the first place, I wish to distinguish between the problems which concern the individual painter and those which concern society. To our Eastern conception of art, the questions of technique belong to the painter himself. The public has no right to determine what it shall be in the present or the future. The individuality of the artistic effort forbids that an outsider should meddle in its methods. The painter himself is but half cognizant

of the secret which makes him a master, for each new idea imposes its own modes and laws. The moment when he formulates his secrets is the moment when he enters on his old age and death. For beauty is the joy of the eternal youthfulness of the creative mind. And it is the sharing the gladness of the artist in his discovery of a reawakened life in the universe that constitutes the love of art to us. One of our monk-painters of the Ashikaga period in the fourteenth century claims that art is as the *Samadhi* of the playfulness of the human soul. *Samadhi*, as you know, is the term for supreme realization in their speech. Indeed, it is the magnificent innocence of the playful genius which is too selfish to be exclusive that makes all great art so unapproachable and so inviting to all.

Art is nothing if not the expression of the individual mind. A Chinese painter in the sixth century defined painting as the movement of his spirit in the rhythm of things. Another Chinese of the Sung dynasty (the eleventh century), with epigrammatic characterization of his age, has called it the mind on the point of the brush. Art appreciation is always a communion of minds. The value of a picture is in the man that speaks to you behind his pigments. It is in the quality of his intonation that we recognize his personality, not in the pitch of the key nor in the range of his voice. What intense personality does not lie in the silk and canvas of the old masters whose names we do not know, whose date even is a matter of archæological controversy? Who of the recognized great painters either in the West or the East has not directly appealed to us despite the distance of time and race? Their language is necessarily different. Some may be in the Confucian sequence of the white, some in the Italian sequence of the brown; others again in the French sequence of the blue; but behind the veil is the mind, always eager to tell its own story. The trade of the connoisseur is founded on the fact of this great individuality of the master which distinguishes him from the forger or the copyist.

The common weakness of humanity is to offer advice when it is not asked. Society has been ever ready to invade the sanctuary of Art. Patronage, with its accustomed superciliousness, has

often imposed its authority on a realm where gold could not reach. Public criticism, with the best intentions in the world, has made itself only ridiculous by trying to interfere in questions where the painter must be the sole judge. Why enchain the vital spirit of Art? It is evanescent and always alive, and is godlike in its transformations. Was it not a Greek who said that he defined certain limits in Art by what he had done? The Napoleonic geniuses of the brush are constantly winning victories, mindless of the dogmatic strategy of the academicians. The foremost critic of modern England has been ironically censured for his undue depreciation of Whistler, as one who was to be remembered by what he failed to understand. The fate of æsthetic discussions is to hang on the Achillean heels of Art, and therein to find the vulnerable point of attack. We can Ruskinize only on the past.

If I may stretch a point, the masters themselves may be said to be responsible for allowing society to frustrate the spontaneous play of later artists. Their personality has been so great as to leave a lasting impression on the canons of beauty, and any deviation from the accepted notions is certain to be regarded with suspicion. Society has been taken into the confidence of Art, and, like all confidences, it has been either too little or too much. The world has become disrespectful toward Art on account of the proffered familiarity. It feels at liberty to dictate where it ought to worship, to criticize where it ought to comprehend. It is not that the public should not talk, but that it should know better. It is not that society should not be amused, but that it should enjoy more. We are sorry to realize how much of real æsthetic sympathy is lost in the jargon of studio-talks.

The very individuality of Art, which makes its problem so subjective to the artist, at the same time makes it defy classification in time. It is a matter of doubt whether we can speak of the "modern problems" in painting as such with any amount of accuracy or with profit. The problem which confronts the painter to-day has been always with him since the days he first traced the mastodon on bone-fragments in the primeval dens of the cave-lions.

Of course, the history of painting means the constant accretion

of the problems of lines, light, and color until nowadays the complex machinery requires a gigantic intellect to set it successfully in motion. The step from the symbolic outlines of the early Nara painters to the depth and intensity of the concentrated ink-poems of Sessiu or Sesson, the change from the archaic drawings on the Etruscan vases to the subtle orchestration of shadows by Rembrandt or the mystery of color-equations as conceived by your living master John La Farge, presents such a contrast as to make them seem totally different. Yet the agony and the joy of the later workers have been equally shared by the primitive artists. They all belong to the common brotherhood of the brush who with infinite patience devoted themselves to the adjustment of styles and materials in order to create and appease the craving for beauty. It must not be supposed that the task of an earlier age was lighter because it was simpler. The burden of artistic effort must have been proportionately the same, for the desire of its real votaries is to carry all that it can bear. Life is eternal and so is art. The ancient and the modern meet within ourselves on the hazy borderland where yesterday parts from to-morrow.

In this age of classification we often forget that the eternal flow of life joins us with our predecessors. Classification is, after all, a convenience to arrange our thoughts, and, like all objects of convenience, becomes in the end troublesome. The modern scientific mind is apt to consider itself to have conquered matter by simply labeling it. But definitions are limitations, and thus the barriers to our insight. A seventeenth-century Japanese poet has written that we feel the coldness of things on our lips like a blast of autumn whenever we begin to speak. Laotze, in his supreme adoration of the Unspeakable, has pointed out that the reality of a house is not in the roof or the walls, but in the spaces which they create. So the reality of painting consists in its innate beauty, not in the names of the schools or periods in which we love to arrange it on the shelves of our historical consciousness.

The demarcation into the Classical, the Romantic, and the Realistic schools is meaningless to the great masters, for they meant to represent one and all of those modes. They are in a sense anachronisms for they transcend all time. They are sepa-

rate worlds in themselves, reflecting the universal formulas with the particular phases of the life around them. The age belongs to them as much as they themselves belong to the age.

It has been said that romanticism is the distinctive characteristic of modern art. But which of the so-called classic masters has not been romantic? If the term means individualism, the expression of the self instead of impersonal ideals, it must be the common property, nay, the very essence of all creative efforts. If the term means the emotional side of the art-impulse in contradistinction to the intellectual, or the sensuous, which respectively represent the classic or the realistic, it is again a name for Art itself, because Art is emotion. A painting is the whole man, with his infinite susceptibilities to the thoughts of other men and the nature around him. It is his essay on the world, whether it be a protest or an acquiescence. Delacroix has been considered the acme of modern Romanticism. But do we not see in him the all-roundness of a great artistic mind? He is an artist. He is a Delacroix.

Again, people are wont to claim that Realism is the insignia of modern painting. There is no Realism in Art in the strict sense of the word, for Art is a suggestion through Nature, not a presentation of Nature itself. We may notice that a vast amount of conventionality exists even in the French Impressionists who are said to have uttered the last word of Realism. Their best productions command respect, not on account of their power of painting sunlight, but in the value of the new poetry they are enabled to express through their outdoor technique. Their division of color was extant long before the modern Impressionism. Am I correctly informed that it was found in Titian? Certainly in Michelangelo!

Realism could not be the special characteristic of modern painting. What painting of all times and all nations has not evinced the desire for imitation? The relation of the artist to nature has been defined ever since Art was born. The climate of the land in which he worked, the amount of light, the landscape, the occupations of men, his hereditary memories, the moral and the scientific ideas of the age, which were intended to give him

confidence in the universe, have determined the character of his representation. His instinct was always to record what he saw or imagined that he saw around him. We must remember that what appears symbolic to us in the archaic forms of painting was considered highly representative in their own age. The earliest annals of painting both in the East and the West reflect the admiration for Realism. We have stories which I think you also have of the wondrous depiction of fruits which the birds came to peck, of horses so true to life that they neighed at night and often ran away from the walls.

Although the development of painting in different countries has created different methods of approaching nature, the original relation to it has never been broken. For nature is a part of Art as the body is a part of the soul. A Sung writer has called attention to the interrelation when he remarked that one admires a landscape for being like a picture, and a picture because it is like a real landscape. Art is no less an interpretation of nature than nature is a commentary on Art. The types of physical beauty in man or woman which have been the source of inspiration to great masters are in their turn determined by the ideal which they set for the succeeding generations. The waves have become Korin to us as shadows have grown to be Rembrandt to you.

I do not know if I have made my meaning clear to you. I have been trying to say that the problems of the painter are individual and subjective, that the method of expressing his personality lies entirely with each artist and forbids any interference from the outside. I hope that I have conveyed to you the idea that the questions which we may discuss profitably regarding painting are not whether it shall be more idealistic or less realistic, whether the artist should create in this scheme of color, or that tone of light. These belong to the painter exclusively, and he is well able to take care of himself.

Then what is the objective side of the question? What are the modern problems of painting which society can fitly discuss at all? I reply that it is the relation of painting to Society itself. Society regulates the conditions under which Art is produced. If it cannot claim the artist it can claim the man. If it cannot dic-

tate his technique it can furnish his theme, and to a certain extent his ideals. It is in the secret understanding between the performer and the audience that both delight. It is the humanity that reverberates alike through the chord of Art and the hearts of the people. The more human the call, the more universal and deeper the response.

Sociological conditions have not, however, always been favorable to the free development of Art and have often threatened to crush its existence, and sometimes succeeded in doing so. It is owing to this that the great masters are so rare. Indeed, it is a tribute to the virility of the art-instinct that we should have even the few. Their lives both in the East and West have shown remarkable instances of struggle and victory over circumstance. Hosts have suffered and have succumbed to social tyranny. Hosts are suffering and succumbing to their destiny.

Nothing touches us more than the weary lines on a great painter's face, for they are the traces, not of his contact with his art, but with the world. One is a joy and a solace, the other is an eternal torment. The antagonism between the two lies in the laws of their existence. Art is the sphere of freedom, Society that of conventions. The vulgar ever resents the ideal. Society is somehow always afraid of the living artist. It begins to offer applause when his ears are deaf—flowers when he is safely laid in his grave. The success and popularity of a living painter in many cases are signs of lowness of spiritual level. For the higher the artistic mind soars, the greater becomes the possibility of local or contemporary miscomprehension. Even in the perfection of Raphael or the princely ease of Rubens, we are tempted to miss the sublimity of the tormented soul of Michelangelo.

Society has not only been inimical to individual masters, but has at times indulged in the wholesale destruction of schools. Political changes have often enacted tragedies, war has devastated many a garden of beauty. With due respect to the interesting qualities of German art, we cannot help contemplating the enormous ravages inflicted upon it during the long religious wars of the Reformation. After Durer there seems to be no painter of that calibre, and the Teutonic race has come to be characterized

as "ear-minded" by other more fortunate nations. The Flemish, the Dutch, the Italian, the Spanish, all have had their share of the disastrous consequences of national convulsions. The French Revolution, despite its far-reaching beneficence, gave a severe blow to traditional excellence. In these we are but alluding to a few instances of the constant persecution of European art by society since the days of the Greeks.

Eastern Art had also its ample measure of such catastrophes. To give an example: the conquest of China by the Mongols in the thirteenth century brought about a sudden downfall of Celestial Art from which it has never since been able to recover. As you are doubtless aware, the time at which this calamity occurred was the brightest age of Chinese painting. It was in the Sung dynasty, so rich in poetical and philosophical inspirations. It was the age when Confucianism had evolved a new meaning by the synthesis of Taoist and Buddhist ideals. It was the age when China was breaking through the crust of her ancient formalism, when political and economical experiments were tried on a vast scale. You will remember that the wonderful porcelain of China was the special product of this period of universal activity.

Painting was the art of the Sung. It is to their masters that the later Chinese, and we, Japanese, owe the higher conception of the quality of the line, or the manipulation of light and atmosphere within the condensed area of black and white treatment. Before them Chinese painting was beautiful in its repose, with the stately completeness of the style which we see in the remains of early Indian or Greco-Roman painting. The Sung artists emancipated Asiatic art from this classicism to turn its gaze on the poetry of movement and seek new meanings of life in the intimate aspects of nature.

It is always fatal to generalize on art-epochs, but none more than on this Sung period, when each artist is a school by himself. I should but tire you with the enumeration of illustrious names like Ririomin, Beigensho, Bayen, Riokai, Choshikio or Mokkei, for they may signify very little to you. I shall only draw your attention to the series of paintings of Buddhist saints owned by the Boston Museum which, though not by any recognized master,

is a fair specimen of the later Sung work. There you will find the expression of an artistic mind of a high order which can hold its own beside the early Italians.

Alas! all these brilliant achievements of the Sung "illumination" were stopped in their full career by the advent of the Mongol conquerors. Their barbarous rule crushed the vitality of the native civilization, and painting had barely a chance to survive. Thenceforward it is a decadence relieved here and there by a few exceptional geniuses. It was not the Mongols alone who inflicted such disaster on Chinese art. The Manchus have come again from the North to impose another alien government. Wars and disturbances never ceased to harass the Celestial painter. What one regards to-day as representative of Chinese art is but a dismal shadow compared with what it was in the glorious age of the Tang or Sung masters.

In Japan, owing to our insular position, we were saved from the Mongol disasters which beset the Chinese art. Yet there are instances when civil wars destroyed local centres of art. One on the largest scale which affected the whole of Japan was the war of the Ashikaga-Shogunate, which raged with few breaks for nearly a century following the fifteenth. It ravaged Kioto and Nara, the ancient capitals where the arts and crafts had clustered from early days. The school of portraiture which culminated with Nobuzane, the virile representations of contemporary life which are seen in the Tosa makimonos, were a vital force before this sanguinary period. The vigor of Buddhist painters had then but slightly abated, for the splendid Kakemonos, commonly attributed to Kanoaka, are mostly produced within two centuries of this crisis. But in the incessant turmoil of the late Ashikaga period the artist had no place to pursue his vocation. The monasteries, which were the nurseries of painting, were burned or decimated of their occupants. The function of the hereditary court painters ceased, for the court itself was suffering through the misfortune of continuous war. Any one conversant with the history of Japanese art will notice how our Art wears an entirely new aspect after the restorations of peace. They have evolved new, interesting phases, but the ancient traditions of the Kasugas and Tosas were lost forever.

The calamities imposed upon Art by the social conditions do not end here. Even in the days of peace we shall find that the so-called encouragement was by no means a boon to Art. The self-complacency of Society is apt to make itself believe that patronage is everything. On the contrary, the word "patronage" is in itself an insult. We want sympathy, not condescension. If Society really cared for good Art it would approach it with the respect due to all the noble functions of life. As it is, painting has been often called to the degrading service of Society. It was this that made the great Tang painter Yenripen tell his children that he would disown them if they ever learned to paint.

Maeterlinck has said that if the flowers had wings they would fly away at the approach of man. I would not blame them if they ever flew away from the cruelties of floriculture. Art, the flower of thought, has also no wings. Its roots are bound to humanity. It is painful to think how it has been trimmed, cut and tortured by unfeeling hands to be confined in a vessel for temporary admiration. Sotoba, a Sung poet, has remarked, "Men are not ashamed to wear flowers, but what of the flowers?" If the Buddhist idea of retribution is to be believed in, the flowers must have committed terrible crimes in their former lives! Let us hope for the painters a better incarnation in their next.

Religion has been supposed to be the greatest inspiration of Art. It is often claimed that the loss of religious zeal caused the decadence of Art. But Art is a religion in itself. The mere fact of painting a holy subject does not constitute the holiness of the picture. The inherent nobleness and devotional attitude of the artist's mind toward the universe, alone stamp him as the religious painter. It has been remarked that in the picture of the bamboo by Sankoku lay the whole mystery of Taoism. The stereotyped representations of Christian or Buddhist subjects, of which, alas! there are so many, are not only a parody on religion, but a caricature of Art itself. Here we see another instance of the effects of misplaced patronage where even Religion made a hand-maiden of Art, and thus robbed it of its legitimate expression.

Again, the ambitions of kings and potentates have led them to use Art for their own glorification. Their monumental works

were not the patronage of Art, but patronage of themselves. The same spirit of self-importance moved them as that which led to the encouragement of portrait painting by the modern bourgeoisie. The instinct is natural, but not favorable to the elevation of Art-ideals. In the hundred golden screen of Momoyama, we find the magnificent tediousness that characterizes the work of Yeitoku, the painter-in-ordinary to the Japanese Napoleon. On the walls of Versailles we feel the elaborate insipidity of Horace Vernet, the historian of the Taiko Hideyoshi of Europe.

Society, in posing as the patron, forgets that its true function is that of the mother. Art was rarely allowed a place to nestle on its bosom. The waywardness of Art born of her innate individuality has caused her to be treated as a step-child. The palmy days of painting were only when the painters had a recognized place in the social scheme. In old times painting was either a trade or an occupation of the religious. The great masters belonged to the guild if not to the cloister. They were Bellinis or Fra Angelicos.

In the East, where hereditary profession is an important factor of society, the family took the place of the guild. Our old master was either a scion of the Tosas, or a monk, a Yeshin Lodzu or a Chodensu. The monkhood itself, later on, gave protection to the brotherhood of painters, for, in the strict formalism of Oriental life, the Buddhist gown afforded the means of liberation from social trammels. You may notice that the Kanos always held ecclesiastical titles, that Hokusai had a shaven head.

It must not be inferred that the conditions in the past which gave to both the Italian and the Japanese painters a recognized place in society, are to be considered ideal or perfect. I am simply pointing to the fact that the position of Art was not at least anomalous, as it is nowadays. The difficulty at the present time is that Society has broken the ancient harmony, and offers nothing to replace it. The Academy and the Institute are poor substitutes for the Medieval guilds or the Japanese monkhood,—the groups which kept up the traditions and furnished a home for Art.

The modern spirit, in emancipating the man, exiles the artist. The painter of to-day has no recognized function in the social

scheme. He may be nearer nature, but is farther from humanity. Have we not noticed how intensely human are the pictures of all the great masters? Do we not notice how distant and cold are the modern productions? Art for Art's sake is a wail of Bohemia.

If we look on the surface of things, it would appear as if there were no time in history when Art was so honored as it is to-day in Europe or America. The highest social distinctions are conferred on the successful painter and the amount of his remuneration is incomparably greater than that given the old master. Yet it is a matter of doubt whether he enjoys the fostering care and the stimulating influences which the community and brother-workers accorded him in the past. The very lack of finish and refinement in their work shows the difference between the new and the old. It is significant that in France, where the relation between the artist and the community is better kept than elsewhere in the West, where traditions are still adhered to by its "Institute," we find the most vital of contemporary achievements.

Modern Art education is not altogether the blessing that it is generally supposed to be. It is true that the academies and the museum have opened up to all what was once a secret of the trade. It is also true that systematic instruction has enabled one to overcome the unnecessary hardship of apprenticeship. But the Art academies cannot impart the benefits of the older method. The grinding of colors and the attendance on the master, however irksome it might have been, were the means of developing the moral fibre of the artistic mind. The constant contact with the master-worker, and the participation in the details of his work, were the best means of obtaining insight into the entire complexity of production. It is the home-life of Art which no school-life can replace. Art-education, as it is generally conducted, is destructive to individuality. Its systematic nature enforces a uniform rule on all. Again, the very facility of modern methods robs the student of that severe training which gave the finish to the work of old masters. Even the universal use of photographs which have come to be an important factor of art-work in these days saves the artists from the necessity of the arduous copying of masterpieces which was the essential point of traditional teaching. Who is not

a painter nowadays? We have so many amateurs that there are no great masters. We have made so much of ourselves that there is so little left in others.

We of the East often wonder whether the West cares for Art. The desire seems to be not for Art, but for decorations,—decoration in the sense of subjugating beauty for the sake of display. In the rush for wealth there is no time for lingering before a picture. In the competition of luxury, the criterion is not that the thing should be more interesting, but that it should be more expensive. The paintings that cover the walls are not of your choice, but those dictated by fashion. What sympathy can you expect from Art when you offer none? Under such conditions Art is apt to recoil either with incipient flattery or with brutal sarcasm. Meanwhile the true Art weeps. Do not let my expressions offend you. Japan is eager to follow in your footsteps, and is fast learning not to care for Art.

The social conditions of modern Japan have laid grave problems on her Art. Indeed, it is with a feeling of sadness that I approach the subject, for at the present moment Japanese painting is threatened with entire destruction. The danger is due to the effects of the series of wars that have continually disturbed us since the middle of the last century, and also the occidentalization of the national life. The advent of the American Embassy in 1853 precipitated the revolution which was to end in the Restoration, the restitution of the classic rule of the Mikado in 1868. This movement was the outcome of the Japanese Renaissance which began in the eighteenth century to recall us to a consciousness of the age preceding the Shogunates. The whole energy of our scholarship was then concentrated on the research and reconstruction of the literature and arts of the Nara and early Kioto period which had so long been obscured during the feudal age,—especially during the long wars of Ashikagas which we have already mentioned. The early half of the last century was marked by the rise of a classic school of painting as a resultant of this revival of ancient knowledge. The age was rich in artistic activity in all branches. Even the old-fashioned school of Kano caught new inspiration by a return to Sessiu and a renewed study of the Sung masters. The

Bunjiu school in the style of the later Ming and early Manchu dynasty were in full swing. Kioto was famous through the names of Okio, Goshun and Ganku. Hokusaid was living until 1848.

But the political agitations which then came over the nation turned our energies into other channels than that of Art. The threat of foreign complications was coupled with the actual struggle of overthrowing the Tokugawa Shogunate. The gleam of the sword and the flash of gunpowder were before the people's eyes by the year 1860. Kioto and Yeddo became the main centres of commotion, and unrest was over all the country. Uprisings in various provinces culminated in the general civil war which began in the vicinity of Kioto, and convulsed the nation from Kiushiu to Yesso. It was in those days that the art-treasures of the daimyos were scattered to form the ornaments of Western museums, when Buddhist painting and sculpture in the monasteries were wantonly destroyed in the mistaken zeal of Shinto converts.

It is heart-rending to hear of the burning of wonderful lacquer boxes to collect their gold, for nobody could afford what was considered a luxury in that moment of universal calamity. Painters had to abandon their profession. Those who did not follow the wars had to eke out a hard sustenance by rude hand-work.

The Restoration was accomplished in 1868, which marks the year when the last remnant of the army of the Shogunate was defeated and submitted to the authority of the Imperialists. It was in that year that his Majesty, the present Mikado, ascended the throne and inaugurated the enlightened policy which was to give Japan a place in the family of nations. But the necessary friction attending the adjustment of the old to the new social and economic conditions was a source of constant disturbance. We had riots and rebellions,—the last of which, the Satsuma Rebellion of 1878, was of quite a serious nature. After that, peace was assured, and Art had a chance to exist. In 1882 we had our first national exhibition of Painting. But the community was too deeply involved in solving the problems of modern industrialism to show any deep interest in the revival of Art. The best energies of the leading men were devoted to the framing and application of constitutional government, the revoking of the ex-territorial jurisdiction inflicted upon us by the foreign powers.

Another great drain on our resources and intellect was the organization of the army and navy to secure our independence; for our national existence was threatened by the continental aggression on our legitimate line of defense. We must try to live before we could paint. In 1894-1895 we had the war with China. In the present moment we are in a death grapple with one of the mightiest military nations of Europe.

The ravages of war are bad enough, but in Japan we have the hard task of facing the antagonistic forces which peace itself had brought to bear upon us. I refer to the onslaught of Western art on our national painting. A great battle is raging among us in the contest for supremacy between Eastern and Western ideals—with what results time alone can determine. I am aware that sincere lovers of Art in the West have always emphatically urged us to the preservation of our national style. I have heard many wonder why we should have tried to imitate you in painting as in everything else. You should remember, however, that our wholesale adoption of your methods of life and culture was not purely a matter of choice but of necessity. The word "modernization" means the occidentalization of the world. The map of Asia will reveal the dismal fate of the ancient civilizations that have succumbed to the spell of industrialism, commercialism, imperialism, and what not, which the modern spirit has cast over them. It seems almost imperative that one should mount the car of Jugger-naut, unless one would be crushed under its wheels. Socially, sympathy towards painting, as toward all other questions of life, is divided into two camps,—the so-called progressive, and the conservative. The former believes in the acceptance of Western culture in its entirety, the latter with a qualification. To the advocates of the wholesale westernization of Japan, Eastern civilization seems a lower development compared to the Western. The more we assimilate the foreign methods, the higher we mount in the scale of humanity. They point out the state of Asiatic nations and the success of Japan in maintaining a national existence by the very fact of recognizing the supremacy of the West. They claim that civilization is a homogeneous development that defies eclecticism in any of its phases. To them Japanese painting appears as

one with the bows and arrows of our primitive warfare,—not to be tolerated in these days of explosives and ironclads.

The conservatives, on the other hand, assert that Asiatic civilization is not to be despised; that its conception of the harmony of life is as precious as the scientific spirit and the organizing ability of the West. To them, Western society is not necessarily the paragon which all mankind should imitate. They believe in the homogeneity of civilization, but that true homogeneity must be the result of a realization from within, not an accumulation of outside matter. To them, Japanese paintings are by no means the simple weapons that they describe, but a potent machine invented to carry on a special kind of æsthetic warfare.

I would like to say in this connection that Japanese art has not yet been presented in its true light to outside nations. Except to the few who have made a special study of it, or to those whose real insight into beauty has made it possible to enter into its spirit, the real meaning of our national painting seems not to have been grasped by the general Western public. Japanese painting is still known through the color-prints of the popular school, and the flower and bird pictures which represent the prettiness, not the seriousness, of our artistic efforts. I beg you to know that in the works of the Japanese masters lies as deep a philosophy of life and religion of beauty as those which animated the creations of Western art. The mode of expression is different, but the intensity of the emotion is the same.

There is a certain phase of Japanese painting which is difficult for Western comprehension on account of its very Eastern nature. The monistic trend of the Eastern thought has led to concentration, where in the West it became expansive. The microcosmic notion of our later philosophy has even accentuated the tendency to express with simplest means the most complex ideas. In some cases, color and shading have been discarded in the eagerness of preserving the purity of the idea. It is not symbolism but infinite suggestiveness. It is not the simplicity of the child but the directness of the master-mind. An ink-landscape of Kakei or Sessiu is a world in itself, replete with the meaning of life. Without actual examples before us it is hard to make myself understood. To

take an analogy, the self-completeness of those masters is in its own way the self-completeness you find in the Mona Lisa of Leonardo or the Gilder of Rembrandt.

The fact that these concentrated poems were enjoyed by Japanese society is the proof of its culture. It shows the ability in the audience to sympathize and fill out the background which the artist has purposely omitted. The public was as much the painter as the painter himself, for both were required to complete an idea. It belonged to the age when the tea-ceremony was universally practiced, as a serious attempt to perfect the art of sympathy. As you are doubtless aware, the tea-ceremony is called a ceremony because it is not a ceremony. It was a vital method of realizing the harmonious appreciation of the facts of mundane life. The guest and the host were alike called upon to create the unity of the room, and the rhythm of the conversation.

I do not assert that Japanese painting has been always able to keep to this high standard. Like the tea-ceremony, it has often become formal and meaningless. We feel the fatigue of the art-impulse instead of its virility. But the worship of the suggestive has been an integral part of our art-consciousness. The ideal was always there, however we may have failed to approach it.

The conservative thinks that it is a great pity these ancient ideals should be lost. I, for one, who belong to the humble ranks of the conservatives, find it deplorable that the traditions of Chinese and Japanese painting should be entirely ignored. I do not mean to say that Japan should not study the Western methods, for thereby she may add to her own method of expression. Nor do I desire that Japan should not assimilate the wealth of ideas which the Western civilization has amassed. On the contrary, the mental-equipment of Japanese painting needs a strengthening through the accretion of the world's ideals. We can only become more human by becoming more universal. The value of a suggestion is in the depth of the thought that it conveys. What I wish to protest against is the attitude of imitation which is so destructive of individuality.

Disastrous as have been the consequences of the sweeping inundations of Western ideals, its ravages on Japanese painting might

have been comparatively slight had it not been accompanied with modern Industrialism. It may be that Western art is also suffering from the effects of Industrialism, but to Japan its menace is more direful as we hear it beating against the bulwarks of the old economic life. To us it seems that Industrialism is making a hand-maiden of Art, as Religion and personal glorification have made of it in the past. Competition imposes the monotony of fashion instead of the variety of life. Cheapness is the goal, not the beautiful. The democratic indifference of the market stamps everything with the mark of vulgar equality. In place of the handworks where we feel the warmth of the human touch of even the humblest worker we are confronted with the cold-blooded hand of the machine. The mechanical habit of the age seized the artist and makes him forget that the only reason for existence is to the one, not the many. He is impelled not to create but to multiply. Painting is becoming more and more an affair of the hand rather than of the mind.

The task of preserving Japanese painting against all these antagonistic influences is not easy. It is a matter of no small wonder that there has been produced within recent years a new school of national painting. Our hope for the future lies in the tenacity of the Japanese race, which has kept its individuality intact since the dawn of its history. Two generations cannot change the idiosyncrasies of twenty centuries. The bulk of the traditions still remains practically unharmed. Of late years there has been a marked tendency to a deeper recognition of the best in the ancient culture of Japan. We are glad to see in the heroic sacrifices of our people in the present war that the spirit of old Japan is not dead. Our greatest hope is in the very vitality of Art itself, which enabled it to thrive in spite of the various adversities which it had encountered in the past. A grim pride animates us in facing the enormous odds which modern society has raised against us. At the present day we feel ourselves to be the sole guardians of the art inheritance of Asia. The battle must be fought out to the very last.



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